DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 445 SO 016 068

AUTHOR Scott, Kathryn P.
TITLE Teaching Social Interaction Skills: Perspectives on Cross-Sex Communication.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (64th, Washington, DC, November 15-19, 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; Educational Change; Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; Females; Literature Reviews; Males; Outcomes of Education; *Peer Relationship; Play; Preschool Education; Sex Differences; *Sex Role; Sex Stereotypes; Student Behavior; *Student Development; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Influence
IDENTIFIERS *Cross Sex Interaction; *Social Interaction

ABSTRACT

While the literature on the social development of children has increasingly stressed the importance of peer relationships, little research has examined the influence of peers in sex role development. Sex segregation in children's play from preschool through the elementary years remains the norm even though we live in a society that is increasingly sex integrated and that requires social ease between men and women. Unfortunately teachers and parents too easily dismiss the need for both sexes to play together and to get to know each other. Teachers can increase pupils' cross-sex interaction by clearly labelling all play and learning activities as appropriate for both sexes, using mixed-sex small group activities frequently, praising children's positive cross-sex communication, and intervening to reduce cross-sex exclusion, cruelty, or teasing. They can also increase students' understanding about gender and behavior by teaching about sex role stereotypes and sexual and cultural differences in communication patterns. Finally, they can reinforce in all children behaviors usually stereotyped as belonging to one or the other sex, and make certain that all children have leadership roles and the chance to carry out and observe prosocial behaviors. A 34-item reference list is included. (IS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED252445

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Kathryn Scott

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

TEACHING SOCIAL INTERACTION SKILLS:

Perspectives on Cross-Sex Communication

Kathryn P. Scott
Florida State University
Childhood, Reading, and Special Education
Tallahassee, FL 32303

Paper presented as part of a symposium, "Challenges to the Social Studies: Data Sources for Early Childhood and Elementary Social Studies," for Early Childhood/Elementary SIG

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES ANNUAL MEETING

November 17, 1984

Washington, D.C.

SO 016 068

TEACHING SOCIAL INTERACTION SKILLS:

Perspectives On Cross-Sex Communication

I am pleased to be here today to share ideas about teaching social interaction skills. My area of concern focuses on interpersonal relationships between girls and boys. What I'd like to do in this brief time is to examine three aspects of cross-sex communication. First I will provide us with a rationale indicating why it is important to be concerned with this topic and discuss several myths about cross-sex communication. Second, we will look at findings from research which describe children's attitudes and behavior relevant to their interactions. And third I will discuss intervention approaches for teachers.

For a number of years I have had both a personal and professional interest in the problem of sexism in the schools. We've seen a lot of national attention on the issue which has resulted in efforts to promote sex equity in education (Klein, in press). However progress has been slow and sex equity in interactions between boys and girls has been a largely ignored concern.

My personal concern was aroused when my three- year old daughter entered preschool, one that espoused a philosophy of nonsexist education. Each day when I picked her up on the playground, however, I noticed that her playmates were almost exclusively female. I was puzzled by my daughter's seemingly exclusive behavior as she had been raised in feminist household

and made friends easily with both boys and girls.

When I turned to the professional literature on social development, I discovered a virtual explosion of books on the social development of children. Heretofore, developmental psychologists had emphasized the role of parents and teachers as the primary socializing forces. Now the importance of peer relationships has a new emphasis. Yet little research has examined the influence of peers in sex role development. The effect of a child's sex has been minimized in much research by examining same-sex groups only. And research on cross-sex interaction is almost non-existant.

When I examined recent reports of sex role attitudes and behavior among preschool children, the traditional stereotypes still prevailed (Honig, 1983; Liss, 1983). Even at my daughter's new school, where one of my colleagues had just completed a study of children's play preferences, considerable sex bias was apparent. Sex segregation in children's play from preschool through the elementary years is the norm. Boys interact primarily with other boys, girls with other girls (Pitcher & Schultz, 1983; Lockheed, in press).

Yet, we live in an adult society which is increasingly, though by no means completely, sex integrated. More women and men work together in professional fields, such as law, medicine, and business. Though the numbers are much smaller, women are increasingly working side by side with men in blue collar jobs, such as construction and trades. Other adult roles call for women and men interacting on an equal basis, social roles such as marriage, parenting, and friendship. If women and men are to

experience success in their adult roles of work, family and peer relationships, and there is considerable evidence that many are not, then they need the social competence and confidence to deal with each other as equals.

So let's go back to the preschool and elementary school where children are playing and working. Do children demonstrate social competence and confidence in dealing with their peers of both sexes? If they are able to interact effectively, why are they not doing so more frequently? What are the effects of gender on social learning and competence? What can teachers do to facilitate equal status interaction between boys and girls? These are some of the questions I have been asking and searching for answers.

Developmental Perspectives

When I discuss these concerns with teachers and parents, several objections are often raised. Some teachers may dismiss the problem as non-existent. In their classrooms girls and boys seem to go to great lengths to interact with each other, much to the teachers' dismay when trying to promote instructional goals. Other teachers and parents think that if sex segregation is occurring, it should not be considered a problem. After all, it's "natural" that girls and boys don't play together. They don't have the same interests, it's part of a developmental stage, and there will be plenty of opportunities and interest in interacting when they're teenagers. Why should teachers and parents interfere? This point of view suggests that it's best for children to interact primarily with children of the same-sex.

What evidence I could find to support the view of a "developmental stage," the so-called latency period, ignores other evidence that this "stage" is not limited to a few years but starts at ages two or three years and lasts well into puberty and often adulthood for cross-sex interaction --a very long stage! While there's some evidence that children go through a period of cognitive rigidity about sex role stereotypes from about three to six years old in an effort to distinguish the concepts of female and male, through the elementary years there is a gradual increase in flexibility about female and male roles, especially for girls. Children of all ages need experience interacting with children who may be different from themselves -- different sex, race, ability level, or in whatever ways.

Another objection is raised that it's too late to do anything about it. After all if children as young as three years already have strong preferences for same-sex playmates and sex-stereotyped activities, then what use would intervention be then or during elementary school years when teachers have more goals to achieve that time to carry them out? This view belies the evidence that a child's current environment is as important as the past in shaping behavior, cognitive as well as social (Kagan, 1984). In terms of future achievement as well as social development, the elementary years are indeed formative ones, particularly for peer relations. For the first time peers are as influential and often more so than adults in shaping behavior and attitudes.

Peer Interactions

Next I will discuss in more detail research on peer interactions in children's play and in the classroom. As I have indicated, children's peer group play is primarily sex-segregated. That is, girls play predominantly with other girls and boys predominantly with other boys. In addition, the quality of interaction differs substantially between girls' and boys' groups. Before the age of 7, boys are more likely to have relatively few but more exclusive friendships with other boys while girls are more likely to relate to a large number of girls (and boys, too) in a more extensive social network (Waldrop & Halverson, 1975).

However, after age 7 this trend reverses with girls establishing relatively few "best friend" relationships and boys sustaining a wider network of friends (Eder & Hallinan, 1978). In the female groups there is greater concern with intimacy and nurturance. In the male groups, there is less exclusivity or concern about intimacy but more importance attached to dominance and the hierarchical relationships among the group members. In an extensive study of elementary pupils entitled "We've All Got Scars," Raphaella Best observed how important it was to the boys to demonstrate their physical strength, their willingness to fight, and even have the scars to prove their "manliness"(1983). Assoociating with girls or doing anything "girl-like," such as performing housework, showing affection, or playing with sissies, was taboo.

In observations of fifth grade children's games, Janet Lever notes differences which may account for different patterns of

friendships (1976). Traditionally sex stereotyped girls' games, such as playing with fashion dolls or board games, are more suited to pairs or small groups playing indoors. Boys games, such as space fantasy games or team sports, require a large number of participants and open, outdoor play areas. Furthermore, boys games are more likely to be competitive, last longer and include successful resolution of disputes. Boys are less likely to end their games when disputes arise but are able to settle disagreements by complex rule formations and dominance hierarchies. Girls' sensitivities to the feelings of others may cause them to bring a game to an end rather than risk hurting another's feelings by continuing (Gilligan, 1982).

As a consequence of the gender gap in children's play interactions girls and boys grow up with very different social experiences. Zick Rubin summarizes these effects:

> Boys and girls grow up with somewhat different models of social relations. In their intimate friendships, girls develop their aptitude for nurturance and emotional expressiveness, social skills that are most relevant to close personal and family relationships. In their larger groups, boys learn to operate within system of rules and to get along even with people they don't especially like, social skills that are most relevant to modern organizational life. Each sex learns something of importance, but at the same time <u>each sex is deprived of opportunities to learn other important skills.</u> (emphasis added, 1980, p. 109).

These differences may explain the difficulties adult men have in establishing male friendships or equal relationships with women. Similarly women are handicapped also by not learning ways to depersonalize disagreements a necessary skill in fostering organizational goals.

What research there is on peer interaction in the elementary classroom indicates that teachers rarely encourage student collaboration (Lockheed & Harris, 1984). In an extensive study of 29 fourth and fifth grade classrooms, Lockheed and Harris found that an average of 11% of classroom time was devoted to small group work, and most of that time was teacher-led reading groups or physical education (1984). Small group work in social studies amounted to 6% of instructional time though most of the groups were of mixed-sex composition. When asked about their willingness to work with mixed or same-sex groups, pupils were consistently negative, however, about participating in mixed-sex groups (Lockheed, 1984). Webb found that achievement for girls varies significantly with the composition of the group (1984). Females who were part of a small math study group with the same number of females and males had higher achievement than females who were part of a majority male or majority female small group. An analysis of the students' interaction patterns indicated that in the male majority groups the one female was largely ignored. In the female majority groups a disproportion of interaction and assistance was directed to the one male.

There is considerable evidence that when children interact in mixed-sex groups, the dynamics are such that the boys take more dominant roles. These interaction patterns appear to be the

precursor of adult society where research evidence that men are likely to talk more than women, exert more control over the topics of conversation, and interrupt women more often than other men (Zimmerman & West, 1975).

Teaching Cross-sex Interaction Skills

Now I will turn to the heart of my presentation. What can teachers do to promote effective cross sex interaction and teach the skills necessary for girls and boys to feel confident interacting more? As social studies educators, we have the opportunity to (1) provide a laboratory where pupils can gain confidence and competence in cross-sex interaction and (2) teach about the effects of gender on the decisions people make about who they interact with and how. If we continue to allow girls and boys the option of not interacting or cooperating with each other and fail to teach them to cooperate equally, then we are communicating to children an acceptance of sex segregation and its consequences. I would like to propose four goals for your consideration and suggest strategies based on research evidence for implementing each goal.

Goal #1. To increase pupils' cross-sex interaction in the classroom.

Strategy A. Clearly label all play and learning activities as appropriate for both sexes. An effective way to promote cross-sex interaction is to encourage children to share sex-typed toys. When teachers clearly explain to children the workings of a

particular toy and have children of both sexes demonstrate the toy, more cross-sex interaction can be expected in subsequent play periods (Spraflin, Serbin, Denier, & Connor, 1983). As a consequence, children have more opportunities to establish cross-sex friendships.

Strategy B. Use mixed-sex small groups frequently as part of classroom instruction. Teachers can increase cross-sex communication by assigning pupils to small mixed-sex groups, preferably ones with equal numbers of females and males. Boys are especially more likely to improve their attitudes toward cooperating with girls (Lockheed, 1984). By increasing planned instructional activities which require peer collaboration and cooperation, gains in achievement are also likely to occur (Slavin, 1983; Cooper, Marquis, & Ayers-Lopez, 1982).

Assigning pupils to small mixed-sex groups can be done in a variety of ways (Lockheed, in press). First, to get students used to the idea, use groups of four to five pupils so same-sex subgroups cannot be as easily established as in a larger group and avoid partner assignments which might cause pupils discomfort at first. Second, try random grouping by using selection criteria unrelated to sex, such as counting off by numbers or birthdates. Third, be prepared to assist if problems occur and discourage changing group membership. There may be vocal resistance to these groupings by pupils. Fourth be firm about the importance of mixed-sex grouping but treat it as a natural expectation without a lot of explanation or justification. One teacher had success by expecting her students to "sit like life" in the classroom with the explanation that in their future lives

they would be expected to work with lots of different kinds of people (Lockheed, 1984). Eventually cross-sex interaction should become the classroom norm, not something unusual or forced. Finally it is necessary for teachers to moniter the quality of interaction. Since we know that male dominated communication patterns often occur in unstructured small groups, merely increasing the amount of cross-sex interaction without supervision may serve to reinforce this pattern.Teacher need to provide appropriate direction to guide children in communicating fairness and consideration in cross-sex interactions.

Strategy C. Praise children's positive cross-sex communication. When preschool teachers indicate their approval of cooperative cross-sex play to the whole class, the names of the children interacting and what activity they are doing together, cooperative cross-sex play is likely to increase significantly (Serbin, Tonick, & Sternglanz, 1977). The use of this technique results in no decrease in the amount of preschoolers' same-sex interaction but an overall increase in pupil interaction. For elementary pupils, the same techniques may apply with teachers praising pupils privately as well as occasional public comment.

Strategy D. Intervene to reduce cross-sex exclusion, cruelty, or teasing. Because of the strong societal messages about sex role behavior, children may be used to acting cruel to children of the opposite sex or actively excluding they from their play groups. If this occurs, teachers need to show their concern and assist children examine the consequences of their behavior (Pogrebin, 1980).

Goal #2. To increase pupils' understanding of the effects of gender on human interaction.

Strategy A. Teach about sex role stereotyping and its effects on females' and males' competencies, attitudes and behavior. This approach can include as little intervention as occasional questions to students on how and when they are interacting with peers of the same or opposite sex (e.g., Best, 1983). Or it could be a unit of instruction examining some aspect of sex role stereotyping, such as changes in women's and men's roles from colonial times to today (e.g. Women's Educational Equity Act Program, 1983). As social studies educators, an essential part of our curriculum is the study of people and their interactions with other people. We need to bring children at least to the level of awareness of sex role stereotypes and their impact. Many supplemental resources are available today to integrate knowledge about sex roles into the early childhood and elementary curriculum (e.g., Hahn & Bernard-Powers, in press; Sadker & Sadker, 1982; Scott, 1982a; Scott & Schau, in press).

Strategy B. Teach about sex differences in the communication patterns of females and males. Intermediate pupils can be encouraged to observe the verbal interaction pattern of females and males in their own environment: on television, on the playground, in the cafeteria, at home, or with friends (Scott, 1982b). After collecting data on the frequency of same-sex or cross-sex interaction as well as the content of the communication, pupils can analyze differences according to the

sex of the person speaking or listening and the situations in which the interaction occurs. As part of a large federally funded project, I developed an instructional text called Decisions about Language which is available to help pupils examine sex-based language differences (Women's Educational Equity Act Program, 1983).

Strategy C. Teach about differences in communication among other societal groups, such as cross-cultural, race, handicap, and religion. Stereotypes and patterns of dominance affect relationships besides those between females and males. Living in a global society, we need individuals who can interact with people of all cultures, races, and handicapping conditions. Many of the same skills essential to accepting differences and overcoming prejudices apply in all intergroups communication. By raising children's awareness of the similarities and differences among many groups of people, we can also deepen children's understanding of cross-sex interactions. Numerous curricular materials are available to teach about group differences and increase pupils sensitivity to these differences (Banks, 1979; Simms & Contreras, 1980).

Goal #3. To increase pupils' competence in social skills stereotypically reinforced in boys (for example, leadership and assertiveness).

Strategy A. Provide all pupils with leadership roles as part of the instructional program. When pupils are encouraged and expected to take leadership roles, we can see improvement in their self-esteem and effectiveness as communicators (Lockheed,

Finkel, & Harris, 1979). Girls especially need opportunities for leadership as part of the formal curriculum since informally they may experience secondary status as a result of male preeminance. Opportunities for pupils to demonstrate leadership can be provided by teacher assigned roles such as team captain, small group chairperson, or hall monitor. These positions can be rotated frequently and assigned randomly so all pupils can participate. Other leadership roles include peer tutor for a particular subject or class expert for a special topic or skill. To exert leadership effectively, pupils benefit from backup support from the teacher, recognition of the role, and supervision in unstructured situations to insure that both girls and boys are assuming leadership roles (Lockheed, in press).

Strategy B. Teach all pupils skills in assertiveness. Females are often at a disadvantage because they are socialized to use an indirect style of speech which may communicate tentativeness and lack of self-confidence. Indirect communication is characterized by qualifies which soften or weaken a statement (I guess that, Perhaps, you should), disclaimers (This may sound crazy, but), or tag questions added to declarative statements (That's a great idea, isn't it?). By teaching pupils how to express themselves directly and assertively, we can counteract the stereotypes that suggest females are weaker or less knowledgeable. In the text, Decisions About Language, I have developed lessons to teach assertiveness skills, including (1) not using qualifiers, disclaimers, or tag questions when direct speech is appropriate, (2) making requests directly (e.g., "Please close the door." vs. "Won't you please

close the door?") and (3) using body language which conveys the same meaning as one's verbal language (e.g., not smiling when one has a negative opinion to express) (Women's Educational Equity Act Program, 1983; Scott, 1982b). Such skills will help pupils communicate respect for their own ideas and be taken more seriously by others.

Goal #4. To increase pupils' competence in social skills stereotypically reinforced in girls (for example, helping behaviors, nurturance, and emotional expressiveness).

Strategy A. Provide opportunities for pupils to observe and carry out prosocial behaviors. According to our sex role stereotypes, boys are often expected to hide their emotions and act "tough" at all costs. Therefore, they may have more difficulties than girls in identifying the emotions they are feeling and the feelings of others. As a consequence they may be less likely to express empathy, compassion, and caring for others (Gibbs, Arnold & Burkhart, 1984).

As social studies educators, we need to provide models of prosocial behavior, such as altruism, cooperation, and interdependence, through our own behaviors and through our instructional program (Honig, 1982). In a survey of social studies texts, Pearl Oliner found an absence of prosocial concepts as organizing frameworks (1983). We can fill this gap by applying the components of many moral education programs which include feeling, thinking and acting (Hersh, Miller, & Fielding, 1980) to social situations, as follows:

(1) Feelings. In order to care about others as individuals,

pupils need the capacity to identify the feelings of others in a variety of situations. By developing the ability to empathize, pupils will be better able to understand the perspective of another, a skill required for expressing nurturance and other prosocial behaviors.

(2)Thinking. To make sound judgments about their own behavior and the behavior of others, our pupils need to apply problem-solving skills in interpersonal relationships (Edwards, Logue, & Russell). In order to think about appropriate actions to take, pupils need practice thinking through possible alternatives and the consequences of alternatives. Feeling and thinking activities can be generated from real-live social situations in our children's lives, from people's lives in history, or from people in literature.

(3) Acting. Children need experiences acting in prosocial ways, such as helping others or expressing compassion. These experiences can be provided through role playing, social action projects, or classroom simulations. By experiencing new ways to deal with conflicts between people, pupils will have the opportunity to gain new skills helpful in interpersonal relations.

In conclusion it is important to keep in mind that we can help children expand their self-esteem by giving them new social skills and knowledge. Stereotypes and biased attitudes have prevented boys and girls from communicating with each other positively. Stereotypes and biased attitudes have prevented some pupils from gaining important social skills, such as leadership,

assertiveness, emotional expressiveness, and empathy. With the goals and strategies outlined here we can better prepare children for participating in equal status communication.

References

Banks, J. (1978). Teaching strategies for ethnic studies. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Best, R. (1983). We've all got scars. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Cooper, C., Marquis, A. & Ayers-Lopez, S. (1982). Peer learning in the classroom: Tracing developmental patterns and consequences of children's spontaneous interactions. In Wilkinson, L. (Ed.), Communicating in the classroom. New York: Academic Press, 1982.

Eder, D. & Hallinan, M. (1978). Sex differences in children's friendships. American Sociological Review, 43, 237-250.

Edwards, C., Logue, M. & Russell, A. (1983). Talking with young children about social ideas. Young Children, 38, 12-19.

Gibbs, J. Arnold, K. & Burkhart, J. (1984). Sex differences in the expression of moral judgement. Child Development, 55, 1040-1043.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hahn, C. & Bernard-Powers, J. Sex equity in social studies. In S. Klein (Ed.), Handbook for achieving sex equity through

education. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

Hersh, R., Miller, J. & Fielding, G. Models of moral education: An appraisal. New York: Longman.

Honig, A. (1982). Prosocial development in children: Research in review. Young Children, 37, 51-62.

Honig, A. (1983). Sex role socialization in early childhood: Research in review. Young Children, 38, 57-80.

Kagan, J. (1984). The nature of the child. New York: Basic Books.

Klein, S. (Ed.) (In press). Handbook for achieving sex equity through education. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

Lever, J. (1976). Sex differences in the games children play. Social Problems, 23, 478-487.

Liss, M. (Ed.) (1983). Social and cognitive skills: Sex roles and children's play. New York: Academic Press.

Lockheed, M. (1984). Final report: A study of sex equity in classroom interaction. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education.

Lockheed, M. (In press). Sex equity in classroom organization and climate. In S. Klein, (Ed.), Handbook for achieving sex equity through education. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

Lockheed, M. & Harris, A. (1984). Cross-sex collaborative learning in elementary classrooms. American Educational Research Journal, 21, 275-294.

Lockheed, M., Finkelstein, K. & Harris, A. (1979). Curriculum

and research for equity: Model data package. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Oliner, P. (1983). Putting compassion and caring into social studies classrooms. Social Education, 47, 273-276.

Pogrebin, L. (1980). Growing up free: Raising your child in the 80s. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Rubin, Z. (1980). Children's friendships. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sadker, M. & Sadker, D. (1982). Sex equity handbook for schools. New York: Longman.

Scott, K.(Ed.), (1982a). Nonsexist education in the elementary school. Social Education, 46, 43-57.

Scott, K. (1982b). Teaching about sex differences in language. Clearing House, 55, 410-413.

Scott, K. & Schau, C. (In press). Sex equity and sex bias in instructional materials. In S. Klein(Ed), Handbook for achieving sex equity through education. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

Serbin, L., Tonick, I. & Sternglanz, S. (1977). Shaping cooperative cross-sex play. Child Development, 48, 924-929.

Simms, R. & Conteras, G.(Eds.) (1980). Racism and sexism: Responding to the challenge. Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies.

Slavin, R. (1983). Cooperative learning. New York: Longman.

Spraflin, C., Serbin, L. Denier, C. & Connor, J. (1983). Sex-differentiated play: Cognitive consequences and early interventions. In M. Liss (Ed.), Social and cognitive skills: Sex roles and children's play. New York: Academic

Press.

Waldrop, M. & Halverson, D. (1975). Intensive and extensive peer behavior: longitudinal and cross-sectional analyses. Child Development, 46, 19-26.

Webb, N. (1984). Sex differences in interaction and achievement in cooperative small groups. Journal of Educational Psychology, 76, 33-44.

Women's Educational Equity Act Program. (1983). Fair play: Developing self-concept and decision-making skills. Newton, MA: Education Development Center.

Zimmerman, D. & West, C. (1975). Sex roles, interruptions and silences in conversation. In B. Thorne & N. Henley (Eds.), Language and sex: Difference and dominance. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

TEACHING SOCIAL INTERACTION SKILLS

Perspectives on Cross-Sex Communication

Kathryn P. Scott
Florida State University

Rationale: We can help children develop their self-esteem by teaching them new social skills and knowledge. Stereotypes and biased attitudes have often prevented girls and boys from communicating with each other positively. Stereotypes and biased attitudes have prevented some pupils from gaining important social skills, such as leadership, assertiveness, emotional expressiveness, and empathy. With the goals and strategies outlined here, we can better prepare our children for participating in equal status communication.

Goal #1. To increase pupils' cross-sex interaction in the classroom.

- Strategy A. Clearly label all play and learning activities as appropriate for both sexes.
- Strategy B. Use mixed-sex small groups frequently as part of classroom instruction.
- Strategy C. Praise children's positive cross-sex communication.
- Strategy D. Intervene to reduce cross-sex exclusion, cruelty, or teasing.

Goal #2. To increase pupils' understanding of the effects of gender on human interaction.

- Strategy A. Teach about sex role stereotyping and its effects on females' and males' competencies, atttudes and behavior.
- Strategy B. Teach about sex differences in the communication patterns of females and males.
- Strategy C. Teach about differences in communication among other societal groups, such as cross-cultural, race, handicap, and religion.

Goal #3. To increase pupils' competence in social skills stereotypically reinforced in boys (for example, leadership, and assertiveness.

- Strategy A. Provide all pupils with leadership roles as a part of the instructional program.
- Strategy B. Teach all pupils skills in assertiveness.

Goal #4. To increase pupils' competence in social skills stereotypically reinforced in girls (for example, helping behaviors, nurturance, and emotional expressiveness).

- Strategy A. Provide opportunities for pupils to observe and carry out prosocial behaviors.

Handout to accompany presentation to symposium of the Early Childhood/Elementary SIG, NCSS, November, 1984